

BODMIN MOOR PROJECT JUNE 1997SATURDAY JUNE 7th

Good journey down. Stopped off at Marwell to buy dancing penguins, then went straight to Westmoorgate to take up the tent. I was hoping to put it up, but it was blowing a gale and would have been quite impossible. Got to Juliot's Well about 4.30, but there seemed total disorganisation about what caravan and where. However it soon got sorted and I had plenty of time to unpack and get straight. Saw Wayne wandering about looking lost so I invited him into our caravan. 7 o'clock and Barbara arrived - wonderful to see her again. Driving back from the site through Alternun, I had a weird feeling of being welcomed back; there is a special magic about the place, particularly the Church. At 8.30 we all met up in the bar. Some familiar faces and a lot of new ones with new names to remember. We had a general introduction and briefing, mostly from Sue H, but Chris and Barbara both did their bit, and I felt the divisioning was absolutely right. One big snag is that the diggers have to leave at 8.05 in the morning! Retired to bed at 11 o'clock but had a bad night like everyone else - cold, narrow bed and duvet falling off constantly.

SUNDAY JUNE 8th

Made it for the 8.05 take-off. As soon as we all had gathered for a tour of the site, the heavens opened, the wind blew, it started to hail and my fingers went completely numb! I was impressed with the inter-play of the experts; no one person took the limelight, and it was really good to see the whole site in perspective. What was so fascinating were the differing characters of the three supervisors, and the different personalities that came through when each of them talked about their own particular site. Chris G enthusiastic, boyish, articulate, but perhaps a mite superficial? Helen quieter but with tremendous thought, conviction and knowledge; Mike obviously very knowledgeable and committed, but not quite knowing how to convey it. After lunch finally began excavating! Hut 23 with Mike and Angus. Mike very friendly and helpful. Hut 23 is a bit of a mess, with contexts all over the place. So how far should one logically go down if there is no obvious occupation level? For the moment I was just inordinately happy to be on my hands and knees again, trowelling away. I felt very

sorry for Mike when his feature turned out to be a rabbit hole . Wayne cooked supper for Barbara and I, and then Henry, Chris T and Christal arrived in our caravan, so it was a pretty late night.

MONDAY JUNE 9th

Terrible start to the day. We went up from Westmoorgate in Eric's 4 wheel drive. The mist came totally down, and we finished up with Helen and Gary walking in front, trying to find the way, and trying to guide the car over relatively flat ground. The biggest problem was endeavouring to cross the leat. I felt really sorry for Eric, who confessed to never having driven in these conditions before. Leskernick was totally obliterated, but we finally managed to cross the leat, and then of course the miracle happened - like the stage curtain rising on a lavish set - the mist lifted and there was Leskernick in all its majesty. Worked in Hut 23 at the back where the cobbles had been taken off, contexts all up the creek and abandoned temporarily. Then worked on S/W side of the baulk - same problems on contexts. But I would think it was extremely rare to work on any Prehistoric structure on the side of a hill and find the contexts simple or strait-forward. Good conversation with Fay about her work at Covent Garden. Lovely girl, highly intelligent, and very like Vicki in age, enthusiasm, and sheer spunk. Got told off by Mike for not cleaning up well enough!

Brought the 4 Institute students back - what a nice lot. Supper in the caravan - beautiful evening at last, and we were all going to have a nice quiet evening. I was just about to go for a walk to watch the sun set, when Mike and Tony arrived with a sociology questionnaire. They brought some fascinating photos of hands, which we tried to match with the characters on the dig - some very easy but others a real surprise. This led on to more discussions, then Sue arrived - more good chat and once again a late (for me!) night.

TUESDAY JUNE 10th

The day dawned reasonably fine, and we had a good morning's work. At lunch had an interesting conversation with Eric. Found out a lot about his background, and talked a lot about the Lake District and my having to judge the flowers at the Ambleside Annual Show ! Hope he might be there to support me ! In the afternoon the weather

steadily deteriorated. Had a fascinating talk with Mike at tea break. He was very apologetic about the context complexities, and then went on about life in general and snippets of his past and hopes for the future - a wonderfully complicated character, and I'd love to know him better. He refuses to co-operate with the sociologists, and I have to say that I feel slightly like an animal in a research lab, as we now have to fill in a movement map e.g. where we go for the break, where we go to pee etc. etc. Then the rain really started. By 5 o'clock I had really had enough, and informed Mike I was packing it in. But by the time we had packed up it was 5.20 and absolutely TEEMING with rain. Got soaked through on the way back, even my waterproof rucksack was wringing wet inside. Barbara and I went to the cafe for supper - I had to go as the lady who runs it had got some eggs in specially for me as she remembered I liked them from last year ! Going to an early bed but first Tony arrived and then Sue, so it was much more interesting than my stupid book and so another late night.

WEDNESDAY JUNE 11th

Another day of morning mist obscuring everything. Got lost trying to find hut 23, Finally located it only to discover it was flooded. Angus and I baled out. No sponges on site so we used the small top of my water bottle. Started work about 10 o'clock and had a nice easy morning. Tony came to "interview" us, mainly about things we brought to the dig with us e.g. clothes, tools, photos, books etc. To begin with I resented the sociologists intrusions, but they are being so tactful and quietly respectful about the whole exercise, that I totally accept them now, and indeed they have made me think of this whole Bodmin project from a much broader objective angle. It was a happy day on site - Mike has loosened up a lot and is really good fun, and Angus is - well - just Angus ! I visited the Survey team to see what they were up to, and they in turn came to see how we were progressing. Found a lot of charcoal. It was interesting to compare the different methods with Stephenson Ground dig; Nick Thorpe would have handled the charcoal and probably licked it, whereas Mike won't let one touch it at all, not even with gloves, as it would get contaminated and be absolutely no good for Carbon dating. The mist came down again at 4.45 and the walk back was yucky and spooky. Wayne cooked supper for the two of us, and then we had a heated discussion, mostly politics and personalities. We drank a lot of wine, and Wayne got more and more

outrageous ("why doesn't pubic hair go grey like the hair on your head ?" etc. etc.) and Barbara and I found it more and more difficult to get a word in edgeways. I suggested that we should have an extended lunch break one day so that everyone (eg. the 2 disciplines) could be brought up to date with what the other half was doing, and also provide an opportunity to air any winges or niggles. Midnight again and still not started my book!

FRIDAY JUNE 13th

Official day off - I woke at 9.25 and couldn't believe how late it was; at last a good night's sleep. Barbara and Chris T are back at U.C.L. and Wayne wants to stay in and work so there is a shortage of transport for everyone. In the end Henry, Christal and I decided to go off for the day. We went to Bodmin museum first, which was a delightful surprise - fairly small but beautifully laid out, and a newly opened room where they had a model of a Bronze Age settlement, really well done, and it really brought Leskernick to life. I can't wait to marry the model with what I shall see on the hill tomorrow. We then had an excellent lunch in the Weavers Pub, and then set off for 12 mens moor. We were slightly worried about going to see the hut re-construction as there is to be an official visit next week, but as I won't be here then we decided to risk it anyway. Luckily Tony Blackman was there, and almost seemed to be expecting us. He showed us around with great enthusiasm (never stopped talking!), took us to the farmhouse for a cup of coffee, and then insisted on driving us back across the moor to where my car was parked as it was very, very wet. So many things came together today, with the museum model and Tony's hut, and I'm beginning to get a far broader understanding of the site as a whole. Wayne cooked supper for Henry, Christal and myself - another culinary masterpiece. Good wine and good conversation. Tony came in with another sociological exercise, this time a map of the caravan site on which to plot one day's movements. A really good, interesting day.

SATURDAY JUNE 14th

At last - a dry day! Perfect day for working, sunny but with a chilly wind. But at least I managed to get down to three layers of clothing instead of the usual five. Worked in various trenches and did a lot of levelling. After we had finished and I had put the level away, my "partner" (who shall be anonymous!) suddenly realised that he

hadn't written down the back-sight reading! Bad vibes and black looks all around until he worked out a brilliant way of rectifying it without having to do all the readings again. We took 4 trench readings which luckily were consistently + 7cms on the original readings, and then adjusted the new back-sight accordingly. There were a lot of site visitors; Peter H who I never got around to meeting, and two geo-morphologists who were the fastest talking/moving pair I have seen in a long time. Mike wants to clear up all the possible features before mattocking tomorrow. Did a large shop on the way back, played "I spy" and then back at the caravan realised we had run out of drink - so back to the Co-op to get supplies. Managed to phone home and talk to Derek at last - 24 messages waiting for me - how depressing! Wayne cooked again for me and Tony, then Mike W arrived and the three of them went off to the bar. I was just going to bed when Barbara arrived back and we were able to have a lovely uninterrupted catching up session at last. Midnight bed again.

SUNDAY JUNE 15th

Left at 8.0 while Wayne was on his way to Henry's caravan to hold a breakfast party - felt a mite sour. The diggers had a site up-date tour. It's amazing how much has progressed (or destructed) in a week. In Eric's hut there is a wide doorway with a passage leading out, and I have a feeling that just outside the doorway on the East side, there could be some finds amongst the rubble there. No sign of the surveyors until about 11 o'clock - I had expected them to join in the site tour and bring us up to date with what they were doing. Kept having visitors and it was impossible to find anywhere to have a pee as people kept appearing over the horizon. Finally started work in the old cobbled area and took off two fairly deep spits, finishing up with a big hump of solid natural down the middle, falling away to the edges of the wall stones. It was a good but tiring days work. With so many extra people around I felt like some peace in the lunch break, so I sat on my special rock. Sue came by and we had a good chat. After lunch we got a message that we were to work an hour longer, and then go and look at some decorated stones in hut 28. We were all extremely tired however and about half the excavators decided to stop at 5.30 as normal, including me. Walking and driving back it was completely clear, visibility amazing, and I realised what a fantastic view we had missed all the first week. Wayne and Barbara arrived back at the caravan at 10 to 10, rather "jolly" by which time I had given up and cooked some supper. Obviously there was a lack of communication as we had never been told there was a party on the hill with food and wineoh well.....

MONDAY JUNE 16th

Beautiful morning. Took some photos on the way up to the site. I get such a strong feeling that the moor belongs to the animals and the ex-inhabitants, that I find myself saying to them (particularly the scruffy white highland bullock who's always waiting) "Good morning, do you mind if I come in?" Hut 23 is now being mattocked, cleaned, and examined for any features. I spent a lot of time sectioning a beautiful feature behind the back stone which I called a drain but everyone called it a bunny run - can't think why. Tony came over and asked us each to take a photo of something that was significant to us. Having taken mine - the rock chair - the questions that he then asked about the significance of that choice served to open and focus my mind. We were really chuffed when Mike's photo was Angus and me in the trench! At one stage ~~stage~~ it actually got hot for $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour, so Angus took a photo of me in my vest top, as lasting proof that it was once glorious! Went to hut 28 for lunch, and had a long talk with Mike W and Justin mostly about music. It would appear that Justin is a highly original and talented musician. On the walk back I was amazed to find that for the first time my legs weren't aching. It got suddenly cold and wet, and in spite of the weather I felt really sad that tomorrow will be my last day's digging. I shall particularly miss my "family", Fay and the three boys, Angus, Steve, and Dan (who calls himself my baby!) Back at the caravan site had a long interview with Mike W on questions arising out of the questionnaire. There are plans afoot for a party in our caravan tomorrow night. It's time for a get-together and my departure is as good an excuse as any! Thought for the day - Archaeologists trying to fathom a site like Leskernick are like sociologists trying to fathom human nature by studying skeletons.

TUESDAY JUNE 17th

Last day and last journey up. Took photo of my "family" as we got out of the car at Westmoorgate. Most of the day was spent with Mike and Angus mattocking and me cleaning up to try and find features. Right at the end of the day one turned up which definately was no bunny run. I didn't have time to finish it unfortunately. During the afternoon the four students came over, made me stand on a rock, and then presented me with a card signed by all of them. I was totally overcome - they are such a lovely bunch. Walking and driving back on my own gave me the chance to reflect on the project as a whole, and how the site, the landscape and the people had all somehow converged together.

Back to the caravan to prepare food for the party. It was a wonderful party which seemed to epitomise the whole feeling of the dig as everyone co-operated on the food and drink, and above all everyone moved round and talked to everyone else and there were no cliques. Helen brought in the most amazing cake, bright green icing (turf!) and the inside made up of multi-coloured sponge to resemble the stones. I was then highly embarrassed but inordinately pleased to finally realise that it was indeed a farewell party for me - given of course that it was high time for a social gathering and it was an opportune excuse! So much real affection around, and sad having to say goodbye to everyone. I shall of course miss Barbara a lot, and I shall always be grateful to her for having introduced me to Leskernick and accepting me as I am - "an enthusiastic amateur".

Thought for next year.....

When selecting another hut to excavate next year, would it not make practical sense to choose one as near to the top of the hill as possible, so there would be far less soil washed in, and the contexts might then be more straight forward.....?

PENNI HARVEY-PIPER
